Lettre du Père Lucien de LaRoche, Mission du Saint-Esprit, 3 May 1713

(Filed among the papers of the Séminaire de Québec, translated from the original French)

To the Reverend Father-Superior,

House of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Québec.

Reverend and Beloved Father,

I write from the country of the Mistassins, two weeks' journey north of the Saguenay, upon the shore of a vast lake enclosed by cedar and stone. The people here call themselves Iyiyuu, which means "the human beings." Their tongue is soft yet full of gravity, and I have begun to gather a few of their words, for in them are traces of a knowledge older than our maps.

During my stay I was told a matter of great wonder by an aged man, a keeper of their sacred songs. He spoke of a light that once rose from beneath this lake, breaking through the winter ice and giving warmth to all living things. They name the being who rose Atâwêw, which in their speech means "He Who Brings the Dawn." The locals refer to him as Yehehezhowa which is strikingly familiar to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They declare he was born here at this very lake as a star that came from beneath the waters.

He said that before men had fire, the world slept in darkness. One night the woman they call Star of the Sea sang above the frozen water. Her breath made the ice tremble, and a flame came upward from the depths — not consuming, but living. It breathed, and its breath became the morning. The elders tell that Atâwêw took a coal from his own heart and placed it in the nest of a heron, and from that ember came their first fire.

Each spring, when the thaw returns, they recall this mystery. They strike stones together until sparks appear and say, "Thus the heart of Atâwêw still beats beneath the water."

I taught them that the true Light came into the world in Bethlehem, the House of Bread, and that He fed His people with Himself. Yet as they spoke, I felt an unease of reverence — for they call this lake the Bread of Life, believing that from its depths all living things are nourished. It seemed to me that Providence has allowed these people to hold a shadow of the same truth: that life is given twice, once in water and once in flesh.

I record this account for your discernment, Father, not to lend credence to superstition but to note how divine memory persists even in the wilderness. The cross and the lake may yet speak the same word, though in differing tongues.

May the Lord guide our work among them and grant that their hearts, already warmed by the light they remember, may soon burn with the fire of His Gospel.

I remain, in humble obedience,

Your servant and son in Christ,

Fr. Lucien de LaRoche, S.J.

Mission du Saint-Esprit,

Lac Mistassini, this 3rd day of May, 1713.